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Notes:
The format is node-based inspired from how TouchDesigner works. Each square holds a logical idea and the lines are the directions of how it could be read and how each idea could be connected. (black lines) It also shows how each node could reference each other (Dotted Lines)

How does translating memory into mixed media help negotiate what is lost and gained in displaced cultural identities and resist its decay?

ABSTRACT

WHAT

Central to this enquiry is the relationship between cultural memory and imagery (cultural fragments), where print, digital, sonic, and installation formats serve as shortcuts to embodied experience — compressing feeling, place, and belonging into portable forms that can be kept and brought abroad.

HOW

This is realised through an iterative process of translating respondent-submitted imagery and stories through various forms. Submitted images are interpreted by myself into artworks, undergoing the first journey of translation, respectfully and with fidelity. The images were then RISO printed with its monochrome file preparation and layering. Finally, the images are transformed and experienced through an interactive installation, bringing into dialogue Touch Designer's generative art with sonic elements using VCV Rack synthesizers. By interacting, the audience also becomes a key part of the work.

WHO

The projected audience sharpened its target throughout the term, where writing and iterating gradually informed each other. Initially projected toward individuals navigating cross-cultural experiences — notably Adult Cross-Cultural Kids (ATCK) and Third Culture Kids (TCK), whose identities exist in the spaces between cultures — the work evolved to invite a broader public into an understanding of the relationships between memory, objects, and the materials that hold them.

CONTEXT

This project began with a belief: that harmony in conditions of fragmentation does not emerge on its own. It requires a designer who considers it possible, and who arranges the conditions for it to occur, and who believes it is possible in the first place. The structure that shapes how memory is translated, layered, and heard is not neutral — it is evidence of intent. And intent, in the context of displaced cultural identity, is itself an act of resistance.

Hidden grief

Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs), individuals who spent their formative years across more than one culture, experience a particular kind of grief that is hidden. It is not the grief of a single loss, but of an entire world: a country, a culture, that carpet in a childhood home, etc. It remains hidden because the social frameworks to articulate it are largely absent, and because the mobility that caused it is often read by others as privilege, not something to be ungrateful about.

Like their owners, memory objects do not remain stable. They wear, accumulate new meanings, and are reinterpreted by the environments they pass through — becoming an "illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original (memory)" (Steyerl, H., 2012). This project proposes that the production of images across multiple mediums — print, generative digital media, sound, installation constitutes a form of translation, and itself a form of remembering. By examining that translation through the lens of displaced cultural identities offers something practically and theoretically useful to the field of Graphic Design, and **this project aims to demonstrate that practice of remembering.**

CCKs often feel isolated alone in a vast world of a romanticized past, where their displacement and homesickness strengthens their attachments. Max Cooper's work blending installation and music in the exhibition "Feel the Sound" at the Barbican, London, embodied this feeling — an intimately vast world of collective memory.

"What do you want to express which you feel you can't in everyday life?"
It was like finding a secret window into our collective psyche, and discovering amongst the chaos, pleasure and pain, so many experiences that we share at different times of our lives, and an overwhelming sense of emotions and connections that I had to explore.
— Max Cooper

Sacred Objects

As they move, CCKs instinctively **collect** objects that anchor them — "**sacred objects**" (or cultural fragments) that represent the memory of where they came from. This project interrogates images of those objects, submitted by CCKs, as sites where cultural dynamics become legible. These are memory objects: not merely photographs of things, but compressed records of identity in transition.

What is gained and lost when memory objects move between media? The distorted and layered images attest to their displacement and appropriation. Through circulation, they generate new networks of connection, **provoking translations and mistranslations.** What they lose in fidelity, they gain in **resonance** — a new aura born from transience and the trace of the copy. (Steyerl, H., 2012)

Each memory object is organised into three categories. The **Original Fragment** is a portable keepsake carried from the culture of origin. The **Equivalent Replacement** is an object found in the new environment that holds comparable emotional weight, layered over the first. The **Perceived Reinterpretation** records how the surrounding culture received, misread, or transformed the object's meaning. Together, these three registers map the arc of cultural translation: what was carried, what was substituted, and what was altered by the act of being seen.

Moving On

Riso as Method
The first method exploring the enquiry was Riso printing. The printer operates through the sequential layering of monochrome channels — a process structurally similar to the layering of cultural memory. The Original Fragment is printed cleanly and upright. The Equivalent Replacement layers over it, offset — the emotional weight of the original persisting beneath. The Perceived Reinterpretation rotates and layers a darker image, registering how external interpretation can reframe what was once personal.

TouchDesigner as Method
The same enquiry is then carried into TouchDesigner, where the memory objects are broken as point clouds: images dissolved into pixel grids, each particle's position on the z-axis driven by the image's own brightness values. The result is a slowly pulsating, as if breathing, images given depth and time. Three interface buttons navigate the three memory categories; for the Perceived Reinterpretation, a live webcam feed overlays the original fragment, making the viewer's environment an active participant in how the memory is seen.

Installation as Method
The installation format is chosen for its interactive aspect. The projected audience's presence becomes a critical part of the project. Viewers alter the visual distortion of the memory objects through the webcam and, through that same input, contribute to the music. The installation is site-specific in a meaningful sense: a brighter room dominates the imagery differently than a dark one; a loud environment changes the sonic register entirely. The environment, like culture itself, influences how memory sounds or looks.

The node system revealed a parallel with the topic. Image information was broken down and then passed on by nodes, each designed for different functions, coming from different "families" (SOPs, TOPs, CHOPs, etc.) each taking a piece of data from an image and passes it on. Similar to the fragmentation of culture for the sake of accessibility of memory for a CCK. It is through this fragmentation process that the images continue to evolve and live on.

From Nodes to Notes
The visual data — RGB values, brightness, layering ratios, is simultaneously routed into VCV Rack, where it drives a synthesizer not operated by a performer but by the images themselves. The memory objects are given voice. The musical system is tuned to the Javanese "Slendro" scale, a pentatonic structure whose five tones are inherently self-harmonising. Whatever notes the images generate, resolution is built into the system. "Slendro" becomes the project's structural argument that fragments from different cultural origins, however distant or displaced, are capable of finding harmony with one another. In the future, it would be interesting to experiment with different scales.

The feedback from participants was a positive one. They generally noted a meditative, zen, cathartic feeling. The immersivity brought them intimately close to the images and stories. One respondent noted having the camera up close demonstrated that. The combination of the music and visuals was magical and therapeutic, prompting another respondent to suggest trying out traumatic memories, or therapy usage. The most surprising however is how they used the buttons as if an instrument. After reading, the interface became more about play than narrative.

Overall, the project was more than mending fragments, it added something more, a beautiful blend of memories and collaboration.

REFERENCES

Pollock, D.C., Van Reken, R.E. and Pollock, M.V. (2017) *Third culture kids: growing up among worlds*. 3rd edn. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

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PROJECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

This work positions itself within the emerging conversation of Critical Graphic Design — a discipline that, as Rock and Poynor observed, is still in the process of becoming. By turning critical design methods toward questions of intercultural identity and displacement, the project proposes that graphic design is fully capable, and perhaps is also responsible, to critically be part of the conversation in this front.

To CCKs, the project acts as a tool for naming experiences that lack social permission to be named — specifically the hidden grief Pollock and Van Reken describe. Design here functions as a form of witness, reconciling them with their memories in an entirely different way. Furthermore, the project introduces the idea of collaboration in memory. On one side, CCKs opening up themselves to others to be part of their cultural story, and other people to be gently part of it, reconciling the past to adjust in the present in order to move forward into the future hand-in-hand.

This project has clarified a position I will carry into practice: that design operating at the intersection of cultures has both the capacity and the responsibility to understand the ever-increasing migratory world we live in, something I am drawn to. The iterative, participant-led method developed here offers a replicable model for future work engaging with displaced or marginalised communities. The questions it opens are something worth pursuing: how can design be used to treat traumatic memories? What does it mean to design not for a market economy, but for collaboration and reconciliation?

Collated

Abstract

How does translating cultural memory into mixed media help negotiate what is lost and gained in displaced cultural identities and resist its decay?

Central to this enquiry is the relationship between cultural memory and imagery (cultural fragments), where print, digital, sonic, and installation formats serve as shortcuts to embodied experience — compressing feeling, place, and belonging into portable forms that can be kept and brought abroad.

This is realised through an iterative process of translating respondent-submitted imagery and stories through various forms. Submitted images are interpreted by myself into artworks, undergoing the first journey of translation, respectfully and with fidelity. The images were then RISO printed with its monochrome file preparation and layering. Finally, the images are transformed and experienced through an interactive installation, bringing into dialogue Touch Designer’s generative art with sonic elements using VCV Rack synthesizers. By interacting, the audience also becomes a key part of the work.

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Context

Hidden grief, Sacred Objects, and Moving On.

This project began with a belief: that harmony in conditions of fragmentation does not emerge on its own. It requires a designer who considers it possible, and who arranges the conditions for it to occur, and who believes it is possible in the first place. The structure that shapes how memory is translated, layered, and heard is not neutral — it is evidence of intent. And intent, in the context of displaced cultural identity, is itself an act of resistance.

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Feedback on Installation Form

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1rzCJeo-y4DAWfL7T-cX0PQg-G638D-r1sNsTLzyW2JUI/viewanalytics>

Cultural Fragment Submission Form

<https://forms.gle/P7Yov8FtmRJ9GMKl9>